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Empowering Our Ministry: The Dynamic of God's Creative Work

Genesis 1:1-5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27

Thomas Michael Smith
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This morning I would like to re-start the Empowering Our Ministry series begun last August, by demonstrating what I believe to be a significant pattern within Scripture. If you would turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1, you will see (in verse 2) that the Spirit was moving over the face of the waters. Other ways to translate the Hebrew say that the 'Spirit was moving and agitated itself over the waters, for the sake of bringing forth vigor', and again, 'He (the Spirit) brooded over them (the waters) to cherish them.' So the sense is that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, hovers or moves over something, a situation, before taking any action.

The action in Genesis 1 is 'taken' in verse 3, when God speaks. His word is a word of command, and it is a command of creative power. God speaks and light is created. In fact, in Genesis 1, God continues to speak, and creation unfolds.

The same basic dynamic is present, and expanded, in Luke 1, with the story of the visit of the angel to Mary as she begins to understand her role in the birth of Jesus. You can imagine the Spirit hovering over her, moving in the situation of her life. At some point, the word of God is spoken or discerned, in this case spoken by the angel, and discerned to be God's word by Mary. Then, this spoken or discerned word of God is met with faith and obedience in her heart.

This completes the pattern of the way God's creative work among us unfolds. First, the Holy Spirit hovers or moves over a situation. Second, the word of God is spoken or discerned. Third, the word of God is met with faith or obedience in the hearts of those who hear.

This is how God usually works in us today. The issue is whether we are sufficiently sensitive to the pattern. Are we sensitive to how the Spirit might move or hover over a situation in our life, in our church, in our marriage? Are we listening to God so that we can discern or hear a spoken word from the Lord? And are we willing to be obedient, are we willing to meet with faith this word which we rightly hear?

I would argue that prayer is exactly about this pattern. Prayer is about listening to God such that we are able to hear and discern God's words which He would speak in our every day life. Prayer is about whether we want to participate with God in His projects, whether we are willing to meet God and respond with faith and obedience.

Jesus is the great watershed in human history. He fulfilled the Old Covenant and established a New Covenant (the Jeremiah and Ezekiel passages read this morning). But the piece that is often lost in the work of Jesus, is that in and through Him, the Holy Spirit began a new work in the world. From the point of Jesus, persons who accepted Christ as Lord gained the presence of the Holy Spirit within. I've said this before, that this indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit was a HUGE event. We take the

Spirit for granted, but the believers in the Old Covenant longed for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's presence in the life of a believer in the New Covenant is of fundamental importance to understand the work of the church. But it's also true to say that only through Jesus Christ may we understand fully the Holy Spirit; that is, without Jesus Christ in your life, you simply cannot (ever) comprehend the Holy Spirit. This makes sense because it is one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit to lead people to justification, to salvation in Jesus in the first place. People can be spiritual, per se, without the Holy Spirit, but their spirituality will not be rooted in the God of the Universe. Is there power in the spiritual realm outside of the Holy Spirit? You bet. But that power will not have an origin that is holy.

The Holy Spirit leads us to the Messiah, to the Christ. Then, once we become a Christian, a follower of Christ, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. With the presence of the Holy Spirit within, we might discover, develop and use the gifts of the Spirit, given to us that we might build up the body of Christ, the church. And with the presence of the Holy Spirit within, we might become baptized with the Spirit, anointed, empowered, to use those gifts in what some people call a 'power ministry.'

But let me back up just a minute and look at Jesus. He had the Holy Spirit dwelling within, and this indwelling Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to have (if He wanted) an intimate prayer life with the Father. The Holy Spirit within also led Jesus to have a transformed character.

I believe that exactly the same situation applies to us. If we accept Christ as our Lord, as the Head Honcho of our life, we gain the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and we too are thus enabled to have an intimate prayer life with the Father; we too are capable of having our character transformed.

Now, I believe that it was Jesus' intimate prayer life with the Father which allowed the Holy Spirit to come upon Him for a ministry of power.

The question of the day is whether we, too, might have such an intimate prayer life with the Father? I believe we can. In fact, I believe that we are supposed to have a prayer life that becomes ever more intimate with God. And I believe that all this talk of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, will be only so much talk, or a new church program, or a fad, if we don't walk this life of prayer with God.

The power of the Holy Spirit comes to those who seek it for the best reasons, for the best purposes. And the only answer, the only reason, is to use the power of the Spirit to build up the church, so that the church might more fully glorify Christ, and become a truly effective witness in the world.

So we must enter more fully into prayer, to 'see' the Spirit as He moves or hovers over our situations, and to hear or discern the word of God, and to discover what projects God would have us join through our faith and obedience. This is the pattern He has set for us, if we want to take Him seriously.

Mary asked the angel a question that is our question as well: How can this be? That is, I can't figure out how God will work in my life! How does this work itself out? The answer provided by the angel is highly instructive. The angel says: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'

The Spirit moved to bring the Christ to birth. The word from God came to Mary from an angel, and Mary got to ask her questions. But before all could proceed, Mary needed to make her response. She could have said 'no.' Thankfully, she said, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'

This is the pattern for God's creative work among us. First, the Holy Spirit moves or hovers over a situation. Second, a word from God is spoken and heard, or discerned. Third, we are allowed to respond (or not) with faith and obedience. God wants us to develop intimacy in our prayer lives with Him. It is through such intimacy that we will be able to see the hovering of the Spirit, hear or discern the word of the Lord, and respond with faith or obedience.

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